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ABSTRACT

When people think about "correctional education," they typically think about only the kind that is aimed at inmates, forgetting that the teachers need educating too; and that line officers and department of corrections commissioners and sheriff's deputies need career-long training too; and the general public, which tends to be more than a little knee-jerk on these issues, needs enlightening too. Education works--not only for the general public but for people in prisons and jails too. Time and again, even when the results of this or that study were negative, of this or that project were disappointing, nevertheless, the well-nigh universal opinion of the best minds in the field is that education in prisons and jails works--the "right kind" of education works to lower recidivism; to make a facility a more humane and more tolerable place to live and work, not only for the inmates but also for the officers, staff, and everyone else; the "right kind" of education works to lower the costs of incarceration, to lessen the level of violence and to ease the tax burden on us all, and eventually to habilitate many people. The members of this conference have gathered together in their common belief in education to make something special of 1995--a Year of Learning about Prisons and Jails in Indiana. (TB)

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Warren Lewis
8 Sept 1994

Warren Lewis

We All Believe in Education

Friends and fellow correctional educators:

Our purpose here today is to declare, if we can, our will to work together and go forward in 1995 with an all-state, full-court press to teach and learn about prisons and jails in Indiana, and especially about correctional education.

We have not come here to criticize and complain about past inadequacies or to fuss at one another about our differences in perceptions and methods. Differences and disagreemens there have been and must be; inadequacies there are and will continue, but these we shall bring into the converstion only when we must by way of zeroing in on something for which we have a purpose to make the situation better.

There are many kinds of education, and each kind is useful in its own way. There's the kind we learn in the street, the kind we learn in bed, and the kind we learn through loss and defeat. In corrections, there are the many different kinds of education that we deliver to the inmates, and there's the kind of education that we ourselves learn in secure classrooms and through conducting studies and by reading books--that's the kind that Anabel Newman and I learned when we wrote this report, *Prison Literacy: Implications for Program and Assessment Policy* (NCAL & ERIC/REC, 1993).

Then there's the kind of correctional education that comes to DOC people and sheriffs and their deputies who work *inside*, day after day, year after year; that's the kind of

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education that comes from standing accountable for security in your facility, and shouldering responsibility for the security that you thereby generate for your fellow citizens so that they can go to sleep at night in their homes without even a glimmer of what you are doing to make them secure.

Today, we need to address at least two other kinds of correctional education--education of the Hoosier public about prisons and jails, and education of ourselves about who we are, what we are already doing, and what more we can do in order to achieve our correctional educational purposes collaboratively. When, as a teacher in Martin University's baccalaureate program at Indiana Women's Prison, I first got involved in correctional education in Indiana, I was embarrassed by how little I knew. The further I go, I am embarrassed by how little all of us know about each other; how isolated we are in our several facilities, schools, programs, and organizations; and how, by working apart, we work weakly, whereas we could be working together with strength. I purpose to make that situation better by defining "correctional education" more broadly than usual.

When people think about "correctional education," they typically think about only the kind that is aimed at the inmates, forgetting that the teachers need educating, too; and that line officers and DOC commissioners and sheriffs' deputies need career-long training, too; and that the general public, which tends to be more than a little knee-jerk on these issues, needs enlightening, too.

When I first started out pretending to know something about all this, I was a minister for a church on Long Island and a ghetto-worker in East New York during the riots in the "long hot summer" of '66. In those days, I was as radical as I am now, but I was radical only in one direction: I saw only the side of the perpetrators, whereas the cops, to me, were *pigs*. (I didn't have a word, then, for "DOC Commissioners," but if I had had one, it probably wouldn't have been very flattering, I'm pretty sure.) Then, one day, while driving down the street, I saw a billboard showing an officer handing a little child in safety back to its mother. One of those little light bulbs turned on inside my head, and the cartoon caption read: "Let's hear it for the *pigs*!" I took that mystical moment to be an inspiration to preach a sermon at my church about the police. Trouble was, I didn't know anything about the police. Come to find out, however, there was a Long Island police chief who was a member of my congregation, so I paid a pastoral call, and thus began my education in correctional education.

One of the main things the chief said to me that day, I put into my sermon, and I have never forgotten, so I'll put it in this sermon, too: "Warren," he said, "When you wear a *blue suit*, you might as well pin a target with a bull's eye on your back, as well, and that does something to how you sit and walk, how you make love to your wife, and how you live your life."

When I saw the piece on TV last night about the high rate of suicide among cops, I remembered my Long Island police chief and all that the cops in the streets of East New York had taught me. I remembered prison educators that I have known who were struggling with overload and debilitating stress and burn-out. I remembered my own ongoing correctional education that I have received from Gary and his people at IWP and Fred and his people at the Indiana State Farm. And I looked forward to the correctional education that I purpose to keep learning from Stuart and Ed and Chris and their people and from you all.

Today, we are DOC professionals, commissioners, directors, and superintendents of education, people on staff and educators; we are sheriffs and deputies at city and county jails; we are school teachers of many kinds--basic literacy providers, public school teachers, college and university faculty, volunteers and paid staff in several kinds of programs; we are church people, and some of us are ex-church people, but whether mystic or hell-bounder, each of us knows that if *we* were somehow to find *our*selves *inside*, that *we* would not want to be forgotten. We are activists and idealists, we are institutionalists and realists, we are organizers and publicists, and we are State employees and politicians stuck with the balancing act of figuring out which way the people of Indiana *want* to go and which way the people of Indiana *ought* to go with corrections and correctional education.

We are as diverse as we are many, but there is one thing that everyone in this room has in common, one thing that we have all benefited from; it is the one thing that makes this conversation even possible: We all believe in education. Our educations helped grow us up and civilize us; our educations got us our jobs; and we are relying on our educations and our lifelong learning to carry us into the future. In our several and respective cases, education has worked well for us.

Education works--that is what Anabel and I discovered when we wrote our book. Education works not only for people like us but for people in prisons and jails, too. Time and again, even when the results of this or that study were negative, of this or that project were disappointing, nevertheless, the well-nigh universal opinion of the best minds in the field is that education in prisons and jails works--the *right kind* of education works to lower recidivism; to make a facility a more humane and more tolerable place to live and work, not only for the inmates but also for the officers, staff, and everyone else; the *right kind* of education works to lower the costs of incarceration, to lessen the level of violence, to ease the tax burden on us all, and eventually to habilitate many people--not all, but many, maybe even most--of those whom society has failed to prepare for neighborly existence through more ordinary means. The *right kind* of education works to make life better for everyone in Indiana by educating for life and for responsible freedom the people who soon shall no longer be behind bars.

We have not come here today, however, merely to rehash academic reports. We have come here today in our common belief in education to make something special of 1995--a Year of Learning about Prisons and Jails in Indiana. Two hours is very little time even to outline everything that needs to be done, but I hope that we can at least agree that this three-step proposal would be a giant step in the right direction.

If we accomplish these high purposes, we shall have achieved something which, as far as I know, has not been achieved in any other State. We will have put Indiana at the forefront with a total public effort to habilitate prisoners and assist our Department of Corrections and our county sheriffs to accomplish their stated goals, goals which, however noble, cannot be achieved without a substantial, but hitherto unprecedented participation, by all the constituencies that you and I here today represent.

The theory and practice of corrections has not yet developed such that it entire communities answeer the call to take part in the process; this, however, is what we are proposing. The jailor alone, with too little money and too little time and space, cannot be expected to make up in law-breakers for the failures of the family, the church, the school, and all of society. That failure is a buck that stops here, with us, with the whole community, and it is the habilitative challenge and task that we, working together with the whole community and the jailor, must accept as our work.

You will find a mandate for this community-education approach to corrections and correctional education stated in the published "Goals" of the Indiana Department of Corrections. Our DOC holds as its mission, among other purposes, to "provide accurate information in an open and responsive manner" to us, "the public, to facilitate informed decision-making." Our DOC is ready to "develop offender programs that provide opportunities for self-improvement which enhances institutional and community adjustment." Our DOC is willing to "develop a system which recognizes the importance of families and children and which responds appropriately." Our DOC aspires to "a department-wide service delivery system" which acts "in conjunction with other government and private agencies and programs." I propose, therefore, that we, the Hoosier community, reciprocate these "Goals" with our own hearty willingness to move correctional education in Indiana forward to a new and wider plane.